1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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C. Constitutional and Social

During World War I the political situation in the Islands remained amazingly stable. The re-imposition of bureaucratic rule by the Governor removed at least some of the opportunities for dispute. The departure from the political scene of Mizzi and Strickland also removed some of the personal animus that had appeared in the political conflict. During the war, the Maltese manpower contribution in labour battalions and on ship was considerable, and the security of the naval base was never questioned. After the cessation of hostilities there followed economic dislocation and in 1918 15,000 Dockyard workers were discharged, only 5,000 of whom had been re-engaged by 1920. Partly as an ameliorative measure accompanying others more directly valuable, and partly as a liberalist appreciation of services rendered, a new constitution was established in 1921 and further liberalised in 1928.

The 1921 constitution provided for bicameral representative and responsible government. The Governor in Council retained limited but reserve powers although no very clear separation was made between domestic and imperial affairs. For some years relative stability was maintained and political parties, major and minor, began to crystallise. Unfortunately for Malta the issues that had already developed (see Chapter V B) survived and, with the resurgence of nationalism in Italy and the logical extension of the process of anglicisation, all the old suspicions and enmities reappeared. The party which was to become termed 'Nationalist' became the protagonist of the still dominant upper middle-class and professional group and of those who saw the position of the Church threatened by the waning of Italian cultural supremacy. In 1920 a permanent Board of Education was created and in 1924 the Compulsory Attendance Act ensured a certain minimum of attendance once a pupil was registered. Although the Church schools remained independent, the growing dominance of English and to a lesser extent Maltese, and of secular education finally sparked off that antagonism to change which existed. In 1927 Lord Strickland returned to lead a party committed to hasten such change. Once again conflict of interests became acute and after a temporary suspension of the constitution in 1930, it was finally revoked, legally in 1936, in fact with effect from 1933 when Italian finally lost its position as one of the official languages (1). To an outsider, now as then, the period appears tragic in that it is characterised by pre-occupation with affairs of little relevance to the needs of most Maltese. The social and cultural dichotomy within the Islands was maintained.

An attempt to restart constitutional development was made in 1939 by the creation of a representative council but World War II forced a return to centralised government particularly during the state of siege. After hostilities had ceased a fresh approach to the problem was made, much in the spirit of 1920, and in 1947 the Constitution which was in force until 1958 was promulgated. It provided for single chamber Legislative Assembly of 40 members. Party government through an Executive Council advised the Governor. He, as head of the Imperial Government, alone had executive and legislative power in those reserved 'matters touching the public safety or defence', advised by a Nominated Council. In practice, this 'dyarchical' system depended on a logically impossible understanding and appreciation of the division of interests between reserved and non-reserved, imperial and domestic, affairs. Nevertheless, and as realised by the subscribers to the Report on the Round Table Conference in 1955 (2), some reservation of power to the Imperial Government is inevitably necessary.

Since 1947, the cumulative effects of economic change have transformed the local political scene. There are now over 150,000 enfranchised voters and political power has slipped out of the hands of the upper middle-class. The most succinct statement of the platforms of the various modern political parties as they were before 1958 and probably still are in essence may be found in the Round Table Conference Report (3). To us, the most important feature of the contemporary political scene is the way in which the modern political cleavage

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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is uneasily superimposed on the traditional pattern. The part played by the Church during the 1956 Referendum on integration with the United Kingdom was most complicated. During the disturbances following the breakdown of Government in the spring of 1958, town and country, proletariat and bourgeoisie, Maltese Malta and Latinised Malta, all reacted differently. Over all responsible actions looms the knowledge that Malta is not a viable independency (4).

As we have seen, education and language have been inextricably involved in politics (5). More directly important is the educational effect on the people as a whole of the system of public instruction. Under the leadership of Dr. Albert Laferla public education became vastly improved in all ways (6), and from his tutelage, more particularly after the Compulsory Attendance Act of 1924, came the generation of Maltese which now forms economically and socially the most important part of the population. After 1933, Italian ceased to be used as a medium of instruction, a standard Maltese orthography came into use (7), and the school system was expanded to meet the most obvious and immediate needs. Education was sadly disrupted by World War II but since that time has continued to improve in quality and range of facilities (8). Compulsory Education as distinct from compulsory attendance came into force in 1946, and in 1955 full-time education became the rule. Some 22 per cent. of children of school age still receive education in private, usually Church run, schools.

It is vital to realise the extent of the social and economic revolution implied in these developments. In the rural areas the change has been one from illiteracy to education within one generation. Even in the towns, and this is particularly true for the new growths associated with dockyard, manufacturing and service industry employment, thoughts and activities are being fundamentally affected by education for the first time in Maltese history. Contrasts between the levels of awareness of the value of formal education are considerable, and the full impact of technical education has yet to be felt - the first Government Technical School was opened in 1934. The chief contrast observable in the field however is between the two age groups, over and under 30 to 35 years of age. The former still contains many illiterate and therefore conservative people; the latter by reason of training as well as age is radical and impatient. The latter attitude is largely responsible for the drift from the land which encourages the domination of agriculture by residual conservatism.

In the field of public health, skeletal public works services had been constructed before World War I. Recent developments may be regarded as logical extensions both in the sector of public works and in the field of medicine. As late as 1936 the judgment of the Chief Government Medical Officer was 'no scheme of sanitary reform ever met with greater opposition than the establishment of the modern sewer system in Malta' (9), but by 1955, about 270,000 or over 90 per cent. of the Maltese population lived in sewered dwellings, Żurrieq alone among the large villages remaining unserved. In parts of the countryside and in the smaller villages, dispersion of settlement renders prohibitive the cost of connection of each dwelling with the public sewers. The more isolated and the more rural areas are now the regions of lowest standards (Fig. 33).

Medical services, particularly in their relevance to the problem of high infant mortality, developed late and slowly (10). The most serious obstacles were those rooted in Maltese social life (11). The strength of the matriarchal tradition in Maltese household has meant that the ignorance of the oldest generation persists in imposing itself on the life of the youngest. Dirt, overclothing and under-feeding, the indiscriminate and early use of farinaceous foods, all these were difficult to eradicate in overcrowded and grandmother-dominated conditions (12). The difficulty of educating in hygiene and personal health an indifferent and tradition-bound population proved insuperable and in 1939 the infantile mortality rate was as high as the average for the preceding 20 years.

The final breakthrough occurred paradoxically during World War II. In 1943 and 1944 housing conditions and diet were worse than any experienced in peacetime but the death rate and the infantile mortality rate began to fall to record

[TEXT CONTINUES ON P. 179]

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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659 A Papal Delegate visited Malta and concluded that the differences between the government and the Church could best be settled by means of a concordat. During most of the year following the Papal Delegate's visit, Britain tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a concordat and to get the Holy See to forbid the Maltese clergy to take part in the general elections scheduled for May 1930. The Vatican, however, declared that Strickland was not *persona grata* and that as long as he remained in power, a concordat was not possible.

In Malta, the relations between the Strickland Government and the Church went from bad to worse. In April 1930, two Constitutional Party Ministers gathered many sworn statements that Monsignor Gonzi, the Bishop of Gozo, had instructed priests to preach against the Constitutional Party and to refuse absolution to its supporters. This inquiry greatly angered the Church. On the 666 first of May, the Archbishop and the Bishop of Gozo issued a joint 659 pastoral which forbade people to vote for Strickland or those can- 648 didates who supported him. In view of the spiritual sanctions that [664] threatened people who voted for the candidates of one of the two [642] major parties, Britain had no option but to cancel the elections. It subsequently suspended the constitution, but kept the Strickland ministers on as advisers.

197 A Royal Commission went to Malta to investigate the trouble. 64 Following its report, Britain restored the constitution and abolished the teaching of Italian in primary schools. In June 1932 665 the Nationalists defeated Strickland and his supporters in a bit- 666 terly contested election in which 96 per cent of the electorate voted. However, their period in office was very brief. The Governor dismissed them in November 1933 for deliberately evading the constitutional provisions regarding language, for they had set about to re-establish the primacy of Italian in the educational system and the civil service. Once again the administration of the islands became the responsibility of the Governor.

186 During the fourteen years of Governor's rule which followed, 64 the deep wounds caused by the long, harsh political conflict slowly healed. The first Italian bombs of the war finally killed the language dispute. The united defence effort and the common suffering caused by the prolonged bombardment further helped to reunite political rivals and suppress parochial quarrels. Britain awarded the people of Malta and Gozo the George Cross for

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They must live together in specially designated premises under the discipline of their order, and they are subject to the authority of their provincial or superior. As we shall see, the position that the clergy occupy in society and the nature of their work is to a very considerable extent determined by their sheer numbers. In 1957 there were 1,229 diocesan priests, friars and monks and 1,588 nuns in Malta and Gozo.[1] In addition to these, in 1958 there were approximately 220 friars and monks and 200 nuns studying abroad or working as missionaries or chaplains to communities of migrants.[2]

There are a number of associations which occupy important positions in the structure of both the diocese and its constituent parishes. At the diocesan level the most important of these are the College of Archpriests and Parish Priests, which acts as a pressure group in the interest of its members; the Cana Movement, which runs courses for engaged couples, a marriage advisory council and a clinic; and the Social Action Movement, which is trying to establish trade unions. There is also the Diocesan Junta, or Diocesan Council of Catholic Lay Organizations. This body, on which most of the diocesan and parochial societies are represented, is an important pressure group. As already noted, it played a leading part in bringing about the defeat of the Malta Labour Party in the 1962 elections.

Many associations, though organized at the diocesan level, have semi-autonomous branches at the parish level. These can be roughly divided into the lay apostolate associations and the devotional societies. The lay apostolate groups have been organized so that 'the Church will be able to exercise its direct and indirect action in all the fields: religious, cultural, technical, family, workers' movements and others.'[3] These societies are usually divided by age and sex, and except for the Society of Christian Doctrine, all are run by village priests who are responsible to the parish priest. These chaplains and the lay leaders generally work out an active programme of lectures, good works and outings. Many of them take part in religious processions and, in general, support the work of the parish priest. Together with the clergy,

[1] *1957 Census of the Maltese Islands: Report on Economic Activities* (Valletta, Central Office of Statistics, 1958), p. 45.
[2] Charles G. Vella, ed., *The Catholic Directory of Malta and Gozo* (Valletta, Archbishop's Palace, 1958), pp. 273–308.
[3] François H. Houtart, *in* Vella, p. 311.

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III

A previous chapter set out the hierarchical organization of the Church. It was observed that rank was determined by seniority in combination with certain marks of honour conferred by ecclesiastical authorities in recognition of merit. Besides rank, these honours often bestow the right to certain external signs, which are much prized. The many religious processions and ceremonies provide occasions on which parishes can display their symbols of rank to outsiders. For example, the Canons of a Collegiate church wear distinctive ceremonial robes, and are permitted to carry a huge silver mace in processions as a sign of their church's rank. They add a great deal of colour and pageantry to the religious processions in which they are invited to participate. An old man once described Collegiate churches to me as 'the ornament of all other parish churches', and added, 'where there are no Canons, there is nothing in a procession.' The clergy of a church which has received the title of Basilica may carry in procession a huge red and gold damask umbrella. They are also permitted to carry a bell, to wear gold buckles on their shoes and, on certain occasions, to say Mass facing the congregation. As with the title Collegiate, the title Basilica can only be bestowed upon a church by Papal sanction. In Malta it has been given only to the Collegiate churches of Senglea and Birkirkara, to the churches of Mt. Carmel and St. Dominic in Valletta, and in Gozo to that of St. George in Rabat.

The bestowal of honours is not in fact determined by merit alone. In view of their importance as symbols of excellence, they become counters in the competition between parishes and between parish associations. Their acquisition is thus a matter of great concern to the entire community, and often becomes the subject of political action. That is, persons and groups try to influence those who make the decisions in relation to their bestowal. Through their network of personal relations, leading village figures, including the priests, try to influence the Bishop and the monsignori who surround him. They also bargain with these authorities, and if an unfavourable decision is handed down, they may resort to an open show of disrespect towards the Bishop – by smashing his coat of arms, for example – to signal their dissatisfaction and so attempt to force him to reconsider their

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claim. The final decision is thus made in response to a great many pressures. The honour usually goes to the contender who can present the best case and apply the strongest pressure. This is normally the largest and most influential of the groups competing for the honour. Thus the number and degree of honours bestowed on any group are roughly equal to its social importance to the community of which it forms part.

The current dispute in Gozo over the bestowal of the title of Basilica on the church of St. George provides an excellent illustration of the length to which the pursuit of such honours may be carried. For many years the Collegiate Chapters of Nadur and Xaghra unsuccessfully sought to obtain this title for their respective churches. During that time the Bishop had been able to avoid having to commit himself. In Nadur many believed that their church would be the next in Gozo to become a Basilica as a compensation for certain privileges which were modified some thirty years ago. The people of Xaghra, for their part, were also under the impression that their church would become the first Basilica in Gozo.

The claims of Nadur and Xaghra were not the only ones. There was also that of the new parish which the Bishop had created around the church of St. George in Rabat. Many argued that this new parish should take the lowest position in the diocesan table of precedence. But the new parish was located in the island's capital, and many of Gozo's most influential citizens had been instrumental in bringing about its creation. Moreover, the church of St. George was one of the oldest in the diocese. In brief, the thought of their parish having an inferior rank to that of the small rural parish of Munxar, hitherto the lowest-ranking parish, was distasteful to the townsmen. As a Basilica the church of St. George could take precedence over all other parishes and occupy a place immediately before the Collegiate Chapters. The partisans of St. George were in an excellent position to make their voices heard in the Curia, and late in 1958 the title was formally bestowed upon their church. The people of Nadur and Xaghra, led by their disappointed Canons, reacted with great vigour. The abuse and violent action that resulted were as insulting to the Bishop as anything that the Labour Party has been accused of directing at him or at the Archbishop of Malta.

Nadur and Xaghra all but severed relations with the Curia.

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Both boycotted the annual festa of St. George, and in 1961 some hot-heads in Xaghra even erected a road block to prevent cars from the village going to Rabat. The people of Nadur refused to celebrate their own festa, or to take part in the St. Gregory procession. They also refused to allow the Bishop to administer the sacrament of Confirmation in their parish. In Xaghra someone exploded a bomb on the roof of the Archpriest's house because many considered that he, an outsider, had not worked hard enough to secure the Basilica. In 1960 Xaghra celebrated only the internal festa, and even that was not without incident. Shortly before the festa, the Bishop received an anonymous letter accusing him of being an enemy of the village. Later, when he visited the village to assist at the High Mass, he was given a hostile reception. Then it was discovered that part of the throne that he was to sit on during the service was missing. Furious at these insults, he issued formal interdicts against the person or persons unknown who had written the anonymous letter and 'stolen' his throne.

To date the dispute has not been settled. The people of Nadur and Xaghra both say that peace cannot be restored until they receive some other honour to compensate them for the lost Basilica. To back up their claims, they have each spent tens of thousands of pounds during the past few years decorating their respective churches. In Nadur the new marble pulpit cost almost £5,000, and the work of covering the walls with marble may cost as much as £20,000 before it is completed.

This type of dispute, however, is not limited to Malta's sister island. The Collegiate Chapters of Birkirkara, Senglea and St. Paul's Shipwreck in Valletta have similar unresolved conflicts over precedence, and they refuse to take part in processions together. But not all their disputes are limited to matters of precedence. In 1949 the people of Birkirkara smashed the Archbishop's coat of arms and heaped rubble in the main door of their church, thereby symbolically denying him entrance. They were protesting because the Archbishop had abolished, among others, the right of the Chapter to choose as Canons only those priests born and baptized in Birkirkara. The Holy See was able to resolve the dispute, and a few years later it bestowed the title of Basilica on the town's church.

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act as godparents. For this reason a number of people, prevented from inviting relatives and friends to fill this office, have preferred not to baptize their children.

Many have bowed to the authority of the Church and have stopped supporting the Labour Party. But in spite of everything that has been preached on the subject, many others still feel that there is nothing incompatible between support of their political leader and loyalty to their religion. This view is expressed in the slogan which is displayed so often at MLP rallies that it has become almost a party motto: 'With Mintoff always, against the Church never.' Although they are told from the pulpit that it does them no good, most members of the Labour Party continue to attend the daily or weekly services of worship that they have been going to since childhood. Besides, many have rationalized their action by saying that the Archbishop of Malta is acting for personal and political motives; as long as the Pope himself does not condemn the MLP they will continue to support it. This attitude is reinforced by the experience of some Labour supporters who have been absolved while on holiday or on duty with the military services in countries where it is possible to be a Socialist and a practising Catholic at the same time.

As a result of these sanctions many have turned their backs on the Church and no longer attend religious services. Before this struggle between the MLP and the Church, it would have been unthinkable for anyone in a small village to stay away from church. A civil servant in one village told me that he had been a confirmed atheist for years. Yet until this past year he had gone to church every Sunday. In his words, 'People make it very difficult for someone who does not go to church, and I have to live here all my life. Besides, I might lose my job if people complained about me.' But he is now an open supporter of the Labour Party and no longer feels obliged to go to church. To some extent, then, the sanctions of the Church have created a social role for the non-practising Catholic.

The attitude of many who support the Labour Party is summed up in the words of a twenty-year-old bus conductor in Kortin. We were sitting around a table in a small wine shop when I asked him why he supported the MLP in spite of the opposition of the Church to it and the fact that Mintoff was regarded as a Communist by so many in the village. He replied in English, 'I am

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would therefore seem that as this need becomes more pronounced, and as the Maltese voter gains in sophistication, there will be increasing pressure to change the present system of voting to one which strengthens the national government rather than weakens it.

VI

In addition to personal kin ties, patrons, political parties and politicians, pressure groups provide yet another way by which the villager can influence authorities outside his community. By bringing interest groups from one village into contact with similar groups in other villages, they permit united action for the resolution of common problems. The band clubs and football clubs have active national associations. Village lay apostolate societies have their own national bodies as well as the Diocesan Coordinating Junta, a powerful body which has now become one of the strongest forces opposed to the MLP. In view of the important part it and the other Church societies played in defeating the Labour Party in the recent election, they will probably be able to provide a channel of contact with the Ministers and anti-Labour MLA's. Some have already begun to apply pressure to obtain playgrounds and public conveniences for their respective villages.

Even the festa partiti have their associations. The Association of Secondary Feasts works to obtain new Church privileges for its members. It is opposed by the Association of Titular Feasts, which has formally advised the Archbishop that if he grants privileges to the secondary partiti, its members will stop celebrating the titular feasts.

Finally, there are also a number of trade unions. Though most have no village level organization or representatives, and play no direct part in village politics, some, in particular the General Workers Union and the Gozo Agricultural Co-operative Society, a large proportion of whose members live in the villages, play an important part in national politics. They thus provide another channel through which persons at the village level can influence decisions at the national level.